



Healthcare Trust Connects Employees in Real Time, Helping Them Enhance Patient Care

Overview

Country or Region: United Kingdom

Industry: Healthcare providers

Customer Profile

United Bristol Healthcare NHS Trust (UBHT) delivers acute healthcare services to the South West of England. It employs 7,000 people, runs eight hospitals, and has a budget of £350 million (U.S.\$689 million).

Business Situation

The Trust wanted to deploy new, real-time communications tools to connect clinical and administrative personnel and support the delivery of enhanced patient care.

Solution

UBHT IT professionals rolled out Microsoft® Office Communications Server 2007. Employees can now see which colleagues are available and contact them in real time using a range of media.

Benefits

- Enhanced collaboration and patient care
- Significant timesavings for employees
- Reduced e-mail traffic
- Streamlined IT management and faster resolution of help-desk issues
- Positive feedback from users

“I can place calls to desk phones, mobile phones, or personal computers. I can also send instant messages or initiate video conferences with a single click.”

Dave Oatway, Computer Services Manager, United Kingdom

With 7,000 employees and eight hospitals, United Bristol Healthcare NHS Trust is one of the largest National Health Service (NHS) trusts in the United Kingdom. To improve employee collaboration and support excellent service delivery to patients, the organization's IT team piloted Microsoft® Office Communications Server 2007. Clinical staff and administrators can use this new technology to locate their colleagues and contact them in real time using audio calls, video conferences, Web conferences, or instant messages. What's more, employees no longer wait before picking up important telephone calls or e-mail messages that could make a difference to the quality of patient care. In addition, clinical staff can contact colleagues to answer patients' queries in real time, and doctors and other medical staff can react faster to emergency situations.



Situation

United Bristol Healthcare NHS Trust (UBHT) is one of the largest National Health Service (NHS) trusts in the United Kingdom. It employs 7,000 people, runs eight hospitals, and manages an annual budget of £350 million (U.S.\$689 million). The Trust is the major NHS teaching and research center for the South West of England and provides acute healthcare services to local people.

In such a large and diverse organization, effective collaboration between employees is critical. But until recently, the Trust's employees relied on telephone calls and e-mail messages for day-to-day communications. Although this approach made it possible for clinicians and administrators to share information, it often delayed responses to patients' queries and created barriers to effective teamwork. An even bigger concern was the ease with which key personnel could be contacted in the event of a clinical emergency.

"Until recently, it was difficult to know which of our colleagues was on-site, and whether they were available to answer queries," says Dave Oatway, Computer Services Manager, United Bristol Healthcare NHS Trust. This led to a number of communication issues:

- As in any organization, it could be difficult and time-consuming for employees to get responses to e-mail and phone messages left with colleagues.
- It was impractical to resolve complex queries using pagers, which typically only allow short messages to be transmitted.
- Mobile phones are off limits in most areas of hospitals, requiring investment in alternative communications media.
- Employees wasted time looking up contact details, such as phone numbers, for their colleagues.
- It was difficult for employees to answer patients' queries immediately without fast

access to specialists in other departments, such as radiology, pediatric cardiology, and pharmacy.

In addition, the Trust wanted to enhance communications so that the IT department could better support employees using new technology at the frontline of patient care. "We recently deployed a picture archiving and communication system (PACS) to manage patients' records," says Oatway. "Employees are still learning to use this technology, and they often need to reach IT people quickly without waiting for responses to e-mail or phone messages."

Solution

Almost 15 years ago, UBHT made the strategic decision to standardize on Microsoft® technologies. At the beginning of 2007, the Trust investigated the collaboration potential of Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007, which supports on-premise audio, video, and Web conferencing.

"We felt we could benefit from improved communications across our distributed organization," says Oatway. "We agreed to try out the technology with the aim of connecting people, supporting excellent service delivery for patients, and promoting teamwork across the Trust."

Initially, Oatway and his team were skeptical about the applications for Office Communications Server 2007. "I associated instant messaging with social activities outside work," he says, "but I quickly realized that the new tools have enormous potential to connect our people securely and in real time, through a variety of communications channels."

Administrative personnel can now work more effectively, with access to:

- Presence awareness, which employees can use to identify which colleagues are on-site and see if they are available to answer queries.
- Colleagues' schedules, which are helpful for setting up meetings.
- Instant messaging, which employees can use to answer medical queries in real time.

With support from Microsoft Certified Partner 2e2, UBHT deployed the new software on existing hardware servers to a test group in early May 2007. "I was very surprised how easy it was to deploy the new technology," says Oatway. "It's no exaggeration to say that we simply loaded the software onto our servers and it started working immediately."

On the first day of the deployment, 20 employees were given access to the new software. "We quickly demonstrated that we could deploy this with little or no impact on our normal operations," says Oatway. "The first users were members of the IT team and IT-literate members of the radiology and pediatric cardiology departments. This group helped us ensure that the technology was 100 percent operational before deployment to an additional 120 employees across the Trust.

UBHT employees access Office Communications Server 2007 through the Microsoft Office Communicator 2007 client, which runs on personal computers, mobile devices, and an Internet browser. Fully integrated with Office Communications Server 2007, this interface provides a "Contacts list" of employees' names. Users can see a coworker's name or a group of names (for example, specialists such as radiologists), along with their presence, which will tell users if their colleagues are busy, in a meeting, away from their desks, or available to take a call or respond to instant messages.

"We are currently working with a beta version of Office Communications Server 2007, but we intend to extend the solution significantly once the product is fully launched," says Oatway. "At that time, it will be delivered to thousands of additional employees, helping them work more effectively and supporting enhanced care for patients."

Benefits

UBHT employees can now collaborate effectively, eliminating traditional barriers to teamwork. They can contact specialists quickly, answer patients' health queries in near real time, and respond faster to medical emergencies. Radiologists and other clinicians can use the new PACS, in tandem with video conferencing, to review x-rays and other patient records in a highly secure way. This supports faster, more accurate diagnosis of patients at the bedside, ensuring that they receive the best possible care.

Enhanced Collaboration and Patient Care

Integrated communications channels and presence awareness features are helping support clinical staff in their delivery of excellent patient care. "Previously, we had a problem of voice-mail tag, with messages being left constantly. In addition, it was difficult to know when colleagues would be free to answer voice-mail and e-mail messages," says Oatway. "We have now addressed these issues with instant messaging and multichannel communications options," he continues. "We won't call unless a person is available to collaborate.

"If I look at the [Office Communicator 2007] interface right now, I can see that only one of my team members is available at the moment. Because I know the others are busy, I won't waste time calling them or sending them instant messages," says Oatway. "Likewise, I've been able to answer three

quick queries from colleagues during the past 10 minutes.

“When I find someone who is available, I can click on a button next to the person’s name to view his or her calendar,” says Oatway. “This helps me understand whether the person will be available to talk to me for the next few hours or is rushing to a meeting.”

Users click on icons to send e-mail messages, make phone calls, or send instant messages, without referring to lists of contact details. “I no longer have to search for phone numbers and e-mail addresses,” Oatway says.

“Instead, I can place calls to desk phones, mobile phones, or personal computers. I can also send instant messages or initiate video conferences with a single click.”

Employees who have webcams on their personal computers start video conferences with their colleagues at the click of a button. “Video conferencing allows us to communicate effectively with employees at other locations,” says Oatway. “I can now hold something up and show my colleague using the webcam instead of walking 10 minutes to another building.”

Finally, one-to-many communication options enhance teamwork. “A manager can now send a message to an entire team, ensuring that no one is left out of important communications,” says Oatway. “This helps to build community spirit and ensures that all employees are up to date with current policies and best practices. Ultimately, benefits are passed on to the patients we serve.”

Reduced E-Mail Traffic

UBHT manages more than 30,000 incoming and outgoing e-mail messages each day, not counting internal communications. This presents significant challenges in terms of network management and compliance with

NHS e-mail storage requirements. “In addition to the network management aspect, the sheer volume of e-mail messages means that important communications sometimes get lost,” says Oatway. “Even when messages are picked up, it can take a long time to get a response.”

The Trust is addressing this issue by reducing dependence on the e-mail system. “Instant messaging replaces the constant exchange of short e-mail messages,” says Oatway. “This makes our job easier, cuts network management costs, and reduces the time employees spend answering e-mail. It also supports continued compliance with storage requirements, with features for archiving instant messages for predetermined periods of time.”

Streamlined IT Management

At UBHT, 30 IT support staff members support more than 7,000 end users. “We are always looking for technologies that help frontline professionals work more effectively,” says Oatway. “When they require specialist advice to diagnose IT issues, they can now send instant messages to their colleagues in the server and networking departments and resolve service requests the first time.”

In addition, employees using unfamiliar technologies, like the new PACS system, can contact the system administrator to quickly and effectively answer queries. “This all contributes to increased end-user satisfaction and reduces our help-desk overhead,” says Oatway.

Rapid User Acceptance

The first employees using Office Communications Server 2007 have provided positive feedback to Oatway and his team. “As well as receiving positive comments, we have had a large number of requests from employees who want to start using Office Communications Server 2007,” he says.

For More Information

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For more information about United Bristol Healthcare NHS Trust products and services, call 0117 923 0000 or visit the Web site at: www.ubht.nhs.uk

“This shows the benefits it offers in terms of eliminating barriers to communication and increasing collaboration with colleagues across the Trust.”

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